

Representative Jim Soletski
Testimony on Assembly Bill 304
Assembly Committee on Judiciary and Ethics
June 30, 2009

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing, today, on Assembly Bill 304.

AB 304 provides that no person convicted of a felony in Wisconsin or federal court is eligible to be a licensed lobbyist for a period of five years from the date of conviction or until the person has served his or her sentence and has otherwise satisfied the judgment against him or her, whichever is longer, unless the person is pardoned of the conviction. The bill also directs the Government Accountability Board to revoke the license of any lobbyist upon conviction of a felony. Similar to an attorney who loses his or her license, a lobbyist whose license is revoked may apply to the board for reinstatement after the mandatory ineligibility period. The board may then reinstate the person's license if the board finds that the person is rehabilitated and of good professional repute.

The integrity of any profession is important. When we allow people convicted of serious crimes to influence the legislative process, we allow for the integrity of the process to be seriously questioned. AB 304 is a bi-partisan effort to address that concern. I have co-authored this legislation with Senator Alan Lasee. It was even previously introduced by my predecessor! I believe that the bi-partisan support this legislation has received shows, that despite our differences on policy, we all agree that the integrity of what we do is important to the citizens we represent.

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Thank you, Chairman Hebl, and members of the committee for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 304 today. I am attending a meeting in my district, or I would be there to present this in person. This is the third session that I have brought this bill forward. I am pleased with the bipartisan support and work of Representative Soletski to aid in moving this legislation forward.

Assembly Bill 304 simply states that no person who is convicted of a felony is eligible to be licensed as a lobbyist. It requires the Government Accountability Board (GAB) to revoke the lobbying license on the day of conviction and allows for a possible reinstatement of the license by the GAB after a period of five years from the date of conviction or until the person has served his or her sentence

Allowing lobbyists with a felony record to work with legislators to draft laws only erodes public perception and raises questions about the ethics of the institution. Assembly Bill 304 is an important step in restoring integrity to the Capitol.

Frankly, it makes sense to prohibit felons from lobbying and influencing the lawmaking process. All citizens are impacted by the laws passed by the legislature and they need to have confidence in the process. Allowing felons to lobby will have an adverse impact on our constituents.

Placing restrictions on felons is not a new concept. In fact, most licenses may be revoked upon a felony conviction. In addition, a felon cannot possess a firearm, cannot hold public office, and cannot vote. It seems counterintuitive that a convicted felon cannot vote but can still lobby elected officials and influence the enactment of legislation.

I ask that you join with me in taking another step to restoring integrity back to the legislative process and supporting AB 304. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am available anytime to speak to questions you might have.